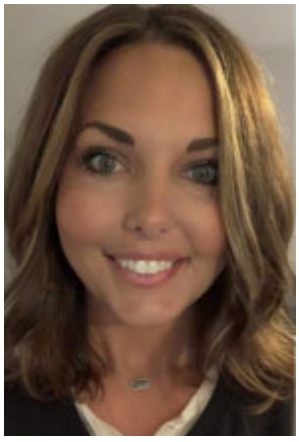
Childhood Connections September 16, 2025

Spotlight on Office of Childhood Teams!

Throughout 2025, this newsletter will spotlight team members who work in the Office of Childhood (OOC) and their “why” for supporting children, families, and the professionals who work directly with them.

Brenda Verslues is the Program Manager of the Child Care Subsidy Program section. In this role, she leads the Family Eligibility and Provider Accounts teams responsible for approving eligible families for child care subsidy and executing child care provider contracts and payments. Brenda has spent the last three years in the Office of Childhood and believes this field of early childhood is where she is meant to be. Her why is motivated by a desire to help every child feel safe, loved, and encouraged to reach their fullest potential.



Sarah Thacker is the Program Coordinator with the Family Eligibility Team. She has been with the Office of Childhood for four years and has dedicated the past 18 years to supporting children and families in a variety of roles. Throughout her career, she has witnessed the challenges children face and the resilience they demonstrate. Her why comes from her time with Head Start, where she saw first-hand the impact of a safe, nurturing environment in a child’s earliest years and the importance of ensuring families are aware of the resources available to them.

Hannah McGrath is the Program Coordinator who oversees the

Program Integrity Team in Child Care Subsidy. She has worked in this role and with DESE for just over two years. In this time, she has had the opportunity to participate in numerous state and federal conferences as well as work closely with both providers and families navigating enrollment and continuing participation in child care subsidy. Her why comes from understanding the long-term benefits of investing in a child's future and wellbeing early and thinking that everyone should have access to that opportunity regardless of their current life circumstances.

Laura Wilmesher is the CCDS Program Coordinator. Laura oversees the child care data system (CCDS) and Missouri Childhood Resource and Referral customer service center. She has worked for the state of Missouri for over 10 years and has been in the field of early childhood for 20 years. She enjoys helping providers and families and is always looking for ways to improve the system and processes.

Sharon Barsby is the Program Coordinator for the Provider Accounts Team of the Child Care Subsidy Program section. Sharon's team covers both payments and contracts, working to align procedures with CCDF rules and regulations. She has served in this position since November of 2021 and has worked with the Subsidy team since June of 2015, making this year her 10-year anniversary. Her why comes from being raised in a home with foster children and understanding the importance of safe spaces, proper nutrition, and good hygiene in impacting a child's future.

UPDATES!

Excutive Order 25-15 Implementation Report

The OOC completed its recommendation of changes to the Missouri child care licensing rules, as required in Executive Order 25-15. This report shares what providers said about Missouri's child care licensing rules and how they should change.

Please see the full Child Care Licensing Rules article for more information or see the Office of Childhood's Implementation Report.

Office of Childhood Stakeholder Webinar

The next Office of Childhood Stakeholder Webinar will be held virtually through Zoom at 2:00-3:30 p.m. on **October 3, 2025**.

Please send questions you would like to be addressed to childhood@dese.mo.gov by Wednesday, October 1.

Click this link to download a virtual invitation for your e-mail calendar.

Click this link to join the Webinar when it is live.

NEW!

Innovation Grants to Support Childcare Program Start-Ups with Business Partnerships

New Missouri grant alert! Start a licensed child care program with support from DESE's Innovation Grant to Start-Up a New Child Care Program.

This grant helps new child care providers launch programs in partnership with local businesses or community organizations to meet the growing need for quality child care across Missouri.

Learn more about Innovation Grants here.

Missouri Childhood Death and Serious Injury Report 2025

Each year, OOC makes available the number of deaths, serious injuries, and instances of substantiated child abuse that occur in child care settings. Child care providers are required to report child deaths and serious injuries to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) OOC.

See the full article on Missouri Childhood Death and Serious Injury Report for more information.

2025 MOAIMH-EC Annual Conference!

Join the Missouri Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (MOAIMH-EC) for their annual conference! This full-day event is on **October 10, 2025,** in St. Louis, Missouri.

For details, visit the MOAIMH-EC conference webpage.

Conference on the Young Years 2026

The 53rd Conference on the Young Years will be **March 5-7, 2026,** at Tan-Tar-A Conference Center in Osage Beach, Missouri. Keynote speakers and session presenters are being finalized and will be posted on the CYY website soon. Visit the CYY website to stay tuned for more updates and make plans to join us for the 2026 conference!

Family Connect Days at Raytown Resource Center

Child Care Subsidy is excited to share that on Tuesday, August 5, 2025, we launched Family Connect Days at the Raytown Resource Center. **Families can walk in every Tuesday**, no appointment necessary, to receive one-on-one support with child care subsidy applications, renewals, document uploads and troubleshooting.

See the full Family Connect Days article for more information.

Monthly MOPD Quick Tip

DESE recommends finding a CPR/First Aid class in the MOPD system before taking the training to ensure the trainer is approved by the system and the course will issue clock hours recognized by DESE.

Use the MOPD System's training event search and type 'CPR' into the course title filter. Then use location search filters to find training near you. See MOPD Instructions for video or detailed written instructions.

If there are no CPR/First Aid classes near you, use the MOPD System's 'Search Trainer Directory'. Select a county, then add a keyword for 'CPR'. Click the hyperlinked trainer name in the search results to find the trainer's information to contact and request training near you.

Questions? Contact MOPD@dese.mo.gov

OOC TEAM HIGHLIGHT! Positive Team Feedback

OOC would like to highlight positive feedback received by **Jacob Nelson**, **Compliance Inspector**.

"I really appreciate all you do to help Centers and how they care for children. I absolutely love working with Jacob Nelson. He is so kind and patient and is always ready to help when/if there is an issue. I look forward to our recert every year thanks to him!"

Thank you Jacob, and thank you to the rest of our Compliance Inspectors!

Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.

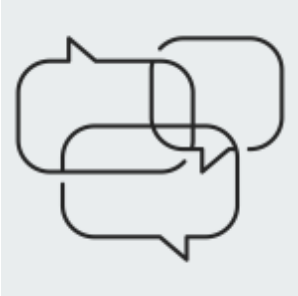
Office of Childhood (OOC) is celebrating its four-year anniversary with achievements in supporting children, families, and providers across the state. Since its launch, the OOC has streamlined processes, strengthened partnerships, and expanded services.

OOC's record of accomplishment underscores their dedication to Missouri's youngest learners.

Visit our 4-year-anniversary webpage for an article on OOC achievements.

We Want To Know

Share your stories with the Office of Childhood!



Submit news and updates about Missouri Early Care and Education!

Or email OOCOutreach@dese.mo.gov.

Miss Something?

Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.

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